

## East Africa Progress and challenges

Sometimes the work that DECP is doing, like supporting of employers' organisations to become more pro-active, more innovative, to represent a real active voice of business and to offer quality services, is frustrating. Often one sees business as usual, whereby the organisations continue to survive, but are not growing to become a real countervailing proposing power to help the country and the private sector forward.

But other times, one sees years of work which then suddenly or progressively result in real progress. This is what we saw a few times recently: a workshop on policy influence, gathering the policy experts of 7 African employers' organisations, showed a very deep understanding about the role of lobbying and advocacy, and the achievement of some results to improve the business environment in a difficult environment.

In the field of organisational development, we see a few organisations embracing innovation and IT to become more connected to members and take members' needs on board. A few now have adopted quite largely the Customer Relations Management (CRM) software, which allows professional management of membership (and membership contributions).

In others, the organisations are in tune with new trends in communication, be it via lively membership brochures, via social media, or other channels. One will start experimenting with blogs and vlogs.

In a few countries, there is also a renewed interest to test if bipartite social dialogue with trade unions cannot create a countervailing power towards sometimes authoritarian or corrupt governments. Progress, innovation and dynamism.

Having said this, the challenges are immense. The business climates are still overtly retrograde and just not good enough to bring sufficient growth and employment for an ever increasing group of mainly young people. Recently there was a study of the Worldbank and UNCTAD on FDI (Foreign Direct Investment). Astonishing figures on the place of Africa in attracting FDI: the total of sub-Saharan Africa attracts 2% of all worldwide FDI, and this 2% goes largely to two countries: Kenya and South Africa. Another illustration: the Netherlands attracted in 2017 twice the level of FDI of the whole of Africa from North to South.

In that context, the importance of building strong employers organisations with real policy influence to improve the business climate is essential. Progress but a long way to go. Perseverance and hope!